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ABSTRACT

A multi-method approach involving observations, interviews, and parental self-reports of family behavior, was developed to investigate the parenting behaviors of mothers who either had been or had not been sexually abused in their families when children. Of the 20 families with mothers who had been abused, 10 were two-parent and 10 were single-parent, mother-headed families. All families in the study had at least one child between 5 and 10 years of age. Nearly all of the families were or had been in therapy for personal reasons. It was hypothesized that, in comparision with non-abused mothers, mothers who had been abused would exhibit (1) more enmeshed and controlling behaviors toward their children; (2) less sensitivity and responsiveness to signals from the child about the child's own needs; (3) more emotional dependence on the child as a caretaker and as the mother's primary interpersonal relationship; (4) more rigidity in their patterns of parenting behaviors; and (5) more likelihood of showing seductive behaviors, as defined by Sroufe and Ward (1980). Discussion of incompletely analyzed data points out aspects of family interaction and explores the impression that previously abused mothers either were struggling with depression, chemical abuse, and despair, or were caught up in a smothering, over-controlling, enmeshed kind of pseudo-nurturing. (RH)

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Parenting Behaviors of Women Who Were Sexually Abused as Children: A Work-in-Progress Report of A Multi-Method, Multi-trait Inquiry

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Parenting Behaviors of Women Who Were Sexually Abused as Children: A Work-in-Progress Report of A Multi-Method, Multi-trait Inquiry

Although much has been learned about healthy child development and effective parenting, comparatively little attention has been paid to the correlates of functional and dysfunctional parenting. Of the many possible variables, the parent's own childhood history has been one of the most neglected (Morris, 1980). Researchers, clinicians, and parent educators could all benefit from a clearer understanding of the important links between the early history of a parent and present parenting behaviors. Consideration of the relationship between a parent's past history and present parenting behaviors is of particular concern in sexually abusive families because of the widespread clinical observation that sexual abuse, like physical abuse, often occurs in one generation after another of the same family.

Sexually Abusive Families

Definition

The present research is concerned with sexual behavior which is incestuous and involves the victimization of children. The term family sexual abuse will be used here to refer to sexual experiences that occur to children and involve relatives who, by virtue of being older, have a substantial advantage in authority and sexual sophistication over the child. Family sexual abuse will here be used to describe sexual experiences between family members at least four years apart in age.

The term abuse does not necessarily mean that force, or threat of force, is used to gain the child's compliance. Many children who are used sexually by family members comply through curiosity, for favors or rewards, or due to reassurances that the activity is appropriate. Others may wish to resist but do not know how to go about it. Aggressive force and hostile intent are involved in a minority of instances of child sexual abuse. Some researchers prefer the term "sexual victimization", which emphasizes that the child is victimized by age, naivete, and relationship to the older person rather than by aggressive intent (Finkelhor, 1979). Because the term "sexual abuse" has gained currency in recent years and is widely understood and accepted, it will be generally used here, although "sexual victimization" is equally descriptive and appropriate.

Sexual experiences will be defined as those involving successful or unsuccessful attempts at exposure, genital fondling, oral-genital contact, and/or vaginal or anal intercourse (Meiselman, 1978). Seductive behavior

between family members, such gestures or verbal suggestions, is inappropriate and perhaps harmful, but will here be considered harrassment and not included in the category of sexual abuse.

Incidence

Family sexual abuse occurs in all social classes, geographic areas, and ethnic groups (Herman, 1981). Father-daughter incest most often comes to the attention of authorities, perhaps because damage to the child is particularly severe and therefore hard to conceal. Brother-sister abuse may occur more frequently (Kegan, 1981; Nakashima & Zakus, 1977) but may have different and perhaps milder effects. Farrell (1982) found in his telephone survey that when the age difference between the participants was less than four years, both participants reported more positively on the experience than when there was a greater age difference. In the latter cases, the younger participants reported much more negtively on the experience than the older partners.

Finkelhor (1979) administered questionnaires to almost 800 college students at six New England schools and found about 19% of the women reported being sexually victimized as children. About half of those were victimized by family members. About 9% of the men reported having been sexually abused, with only one-fifth of those victimized by a family member. These findings indicate that child sexual abuse may be be much more common among the general population than previously imagined.

High as these figures are, the incidence found in some specific populations is still higher. Malmquist, Kiresuk, and Spano (1966) reported that 25% of their sample of unwed mothers had a history of familial sexual abuse. Rosenfeld (1979) studied eighteen outpatients over a one-year period and found a 33% incidence of family sexual abuse. Benward and Densen-Gerber (1975) studied a group of 118 female drug abusers in a residential therapeutic community treatment program. They found that 44% of that sample experienced family sexual abuse as children.

Effects on Children

Although some writers have suggested that not all adult-child incest experiences are necessarily harmful (Oremland & Oremland, 1977; Yorukoclu & Kemph, 1969), most authorities are in agreement that incest is damaging to children. Those children most damaged by incestuous experiences appear to be those who are abused by a parent or a parent-figure. The parent who violates the incest taboo puts his or her own immature needs before the needs of the child. Thus the parent uses the child rather than fulfilling his or her obligation to further the child's development. Sexual abuse by parents is first and foremost a violation of trust. If one can assume that the more the child is dependent on the family member who initiates sexual abuse, the more destructive the abuse, then one would expect sibling incest, in general, to have less severe consequences than parent-child incest.

Among the most frequently described symptoms among therapy clients who were sexually abused as children are depression, suicide attempts, psychosomatic symptoms, and problems involving chronic pain. Adults who were sexual abuse victims are likely to have sexual problems as adults, such as orgasmic and other dysfunctions, promiscuity, or confusion over sexual orientation (Herman & Hirschman, 1977). A striking eighty-seven per cent of Meiselman's (1978) sample of incest victims had such sexual problems, compared to twenty per cent of the control group. Also common in her sample were related problems such as marital instability, conflict with partners over sexual issues, and rejection of marriage as a life-style. Cohen (1981) describes a splitting of affection and sexual behavior which inevitably leads to marital problems. Also of concern are abuse and neglect of the victim's own children (Greenberg, 1979).

In children who experience sexual abuse, frequently observed problems are learning problems, psychosomatic distress, and running away from home. Anti-social behaviors such as stealing and lying may also occur. That children feel guilty, anxious, confused, and bewildered at the time the incest is disclosed is frequently reported (Peters, 1976; Meiselman, 1978; Maisch, 1972). Two recent studies (Goodwin, et al., 1979; Gross, 1979) found guilt, shame, depression, and anxiety combined with physical symptoms such as convulsions and hysterical seizures, which disappeared with therapy.

Family Boundaries

Children who are used sexually by older family members grow up in family systems where boundaries are disturbed. Boundaries can be viewed as the interface between the family and the outside world, and between various parts within the family. The exterior boundary is formed through the processes of blocking some interactions with non-members and facilitating certain interactions among members only. The boundary constitutes the rules defining who participates and how (Minuchin, 1974). The purpose of the boundary is to protect the system as a differentiated entity. A functional family is one in which there are status schisms between generations, status differentiations between children of different ages, demarcations between sub-systems, and a clear but permeable boundary around the nuclear family. Insufficient internal boundaries in the nuclear family represent a recipe for symptoms and distress of one kind or another.

Sexually abusive families are generally considered to be enmeshed, with an overly strong external boundary and insufficient internal boundaries. The powerful external boundary fosters isolation from the larger community outside the family, by restricting contacts with non-family members. It protects the family from unwanted threats to the rigid and ingrown family behavior patterns. While the external family boundary is too impermeable, internal boundaries between subsystems and between individuals are too weak. Lack of personal privacy and a cross-over of function between generations are the expression of inadequate internal boundaries.

When subsystem boundaries are diffuse, parents may be childlike in their

emotional dependence, while children are assigned and assume adult roles. Drafting a child to meet the sexual needs of a parent is an obvious example. Another typical symptom is the burdening of one or more children with major responsibility for running the household and caring for younger children. Children in such a system feel a special burden of responsibility for their family and its protection.

An overly-rigid exterior boundary and overly-permeable subsystem boundaries are aspects of enmeshment in family systems (Minuchin, 1974). Yet another aspect is the diffusion of interpersonal boundaries. When this happens, family members intrude on each others' feelings and communications. As distance decreases, the heightened sense of belonging requires a major yielding of autonomy. Individual autonomy is restricted, and the processes of differentiation are handicapped. Conflicts are often submerged because of emphasis on belongingness. Any separation or distancing may be interpreted as an act of betrayal. This demand for loyalty and conformity, regardless of personal cost, makes it very difficult for an abused child to get help within the family or to ask for help from an outsider.

Role Expectations

Inadequate boundaries reflect inadequate role distinctions between the parental subsystem and the child subsystem. When adequate boundaries are present, parents take responsibility for executive and nurturing roles. Appropriate role distinctions give children the emotional freedom to tackle the developmental tasks of differentiating from parents and developing separate identities.

Role distinctions emerge from societal expectations as well as from explicit and implicit negotiations among family members. Over the years, parents and children develop and share the same set of role expectations. Parents and children perform appropriate roles to the extent that their mutually-shared expectations reflect the guidance and constraint of society. Normally, parents become responsive to the expectations of children and other social agents that parents provide comfort, nurturance, encouragement, and companionship within the parent-child relationship. Thus a two-year-old, when asked whether it wasn't very kind of her mother to plan a picnic outing and pack a lunch, replied in surprise, "She's the mother!" Within that role, the child viewed the mother's activity as only natural and expected. In abusive families, children internalize the expectation that they should meet their parents' needs. Thus a young adolescent, who had been sexually and physically abused by her mother and step-father, spoke to this writer about a possible future relationship with her mother by saying sorrowfully, "Maybe I can make her happy."

Lack of adequate role expectations lead to the drafting of children to carry out adult roles both in concrete ways, by assuming sexual tasks or a disproportionate share of household work, and in emotional ways, by suppressing their own needs in order to meet those of their parents.

Parenting

In the sexually abusive family, enmeshed dynamics may combine with a lack of nurturing for the children. Typically, both parents had childhood relationships in their families of origin that were emotionally impoverished. Their background of emotional deprivation produces adults who have poor impulse control and inadequate performance in their roles as spouses and parents (Mitnick, 1982). Such people tend to marry partners of similarly deprived backgrounds, with the result that neither parent is able to provide nurturance. Such parents look to their children to satisfy their own unmet needs for support, affection and loyalty. Overwhelmed by their own unmet needs, these adults are unable to focus on their children's needs. Thus they produce yet another generation marked by emotional deprivation (Mitnick, 1982).

Clinical impressions indicate that much of the parenting behavior in sexually abusive families is disturbed or "different" from parenting in other families well before the onset of overt abuse. The findings of Sroufe and Ward (1980), in a longitudinal study of mother-child interaction, back up such impressions. Serendipitous identification of a sub-group of mothers who exhibited seductive behaviors toward their two-year-old male children led to identification of a reliably coded range of inappropriately sensual behaviors by mothers. Mothers in this sub-group attempted to influence their children's behavior through certain forms of sensual physical contact, sensual teasing, promises of affection, and requests to meet maternal needs for affection. The children were drawn into patterns of behavior that were over-stimulating and role-inappropriate.

More extensive study of this sub-group (Morris, 1980) indicated that most of the women had themselves been sexually abused as children, or had been "spousified" in a family constellation in which the girl was drafted to meet her father's emotional needs, e.g. used as a confident about extramarital affairs. The girls were triangulated into the parent's relationship in such a way that, as daughters, they performed some of the aspects of the wife's role. Such generational crossover has been identified above as characteristic of sexually abusive family systems. These women who were seductive with their toddler sons also scored higher on use of physical punishment and threats of physical punishment than other mothers in the sample.

Routine, or day-to-day, parenting behaviors of sexually abusive families have had little systematic study, although some informal or clinical observations have been offered. The bulk of sexual abuse research has focused on abuse dynamics and on the profiling incest fathers, sexually abused children, and the mothers of victims. As Finkelhor observes (1979), it is now necessary to turn from a focus on incidence and personality types of individual family members to other aspects of family life, such as socialization, interaction, and parenting. Kegan (1981) suggests a need to address issues pertaining to current parent-child relationships in regard to security, intimacy, sensitivity, and nurturance. The present study is designed to begin this work.

Hypotheses

The present study focuses on the parenting behaviors of mothers. One reason for this is that the marriages of women with a sexual abuse history are often unstable, and children generally remain with their mothers. Therefore, much of the parenting the children experience is that of their mothers. However, parenting behaviors of fathers are also extremely important and deserve to be the subject of future research.

The issues summarized in the above sections lead to the development of several hypotheses about the parenting behaviors of women who were sexually abused in childhood. For example, mothers who were abused are predicted to have:

1) more enmeshed and controlling behaviors toward their children than non-abused mothers.

2) less sensitivity and responsiveness to signals from the child about the child's own needs than non-abused mothers.

3) more emotional dependence on the child as a caretaker and as the mother's primary interpersonal relationship than non-abused mothers.

4) more rigidity in their patterns of parenting behaviors than non-abused mothers.

5) more likelihood of showing seductive behaviors, as defined by Sroufe and Ward (1980), towards their children than non-abused mothers.

Methods

A multi-method approach was developed involving observation, interview, and self-report, from parents, of family behavior. The observations are of structured interaction tasks which were carried out by the mother, father (when present), and children of forty families. The interactions were videotaped for systematic analysis. Secondly, structured interviews regarding parenting techniques, experiences and attitudes were conducted with the mothers. Thirdly, parents completed FACES II, a brief self-report measure dealing with family behaviors on the dimensions of cohesion and adaptability.

The families in this study were selected on the basis of the sexual abuse status of the mothers. If the mother had been sexually abused as a child within her family-of-origin, her present family was designated part of Group A. Of the twenty families in Group A, ten were two-parent families, and ten were single-parent, mother-headed families. All families in the study had at least one child between the ages of five and ten.

Group B comprised the families of women who were or had been in therapy, but who were not sexually or physically abused in their families when they were children. Physically abused women were excluded from this group because it is possible that some of the parenting dynamics in physically abusive families are similar to those in sexually abusive families. This would be an important topic for exploration in future research. As in Group A, half the women in Group B were married, though not necessarily to the children's father, and half were single.

The families, all located in a large mid-Western metropolitan area, volunteered for the study after learning about it through therapists and social service agencies, parent education groups, and newspaper ads. Half of the families in each of the two groups were single-parent families and 95% of the families in both groups have been in therapy for personal issues. Ninety-five percent of the mothers were white.

Appointments took place either in the family's home or in a University-owned house used for family research. Families were paid $15 for taking part, plus $5 for transportation costs and time if they came to the University.

Interview

One method used in the research was an audiotaped interview with the mother on the rearing and development of one child (the youngest who is over five). The interview schedule was an adapted schedule based on an interview developed by Sears et al (1957). The adaptation was influenced by Baumrind (1974), as well as the requirements of the current study. The interviews took one to two hours, and were administered by a female interviewer experienced in working clinically with sexual abuse victims. Both specific items (How often have you has occasion to spank Jason in the last two weeks?) and open-ended items (What sort of things do you enjoy about Jason?) were included. Questions ranged from the parent's handling of developmental stages to current practices regarding discipline, the child's general adjustment, and the mother's feelings about her parenting experience. The interview focused on general parenting experience, and was identical for the abused and non-abused groups of mothers.

This interview is analyzed by means of scales for coding behaviors and attitudes. Although the Sears interview schedule includes scales for coding, the codes had to be largely rewritten to suit the needs of the current study. When coding is complete and the reliability of the scales is determined, the interview schedule and codebook will be made available.

Observations of Structured Interaction

A second method used in the research involved analysis of observed behavior. All family members over five years old took part in a structured session in which the family was given four "talking tasks". Sessions were

videotaped and child care was provided for children under five. Two of the tasks were from the Watzlawick Structured Family Interview (Watzlawick, 1966). These included planning something to do for fun, and discussing the meaning of a proverb. For the other two tasks, the family finished stories that were started for them by the facilitator. One story involved a bedtime conflict between a parent and child, while the other dealt with a moral dilemma faced by a child who observed friends stealing. The first task was used as a warm-up and was not coded. A total of twelve minutes of interaction remained for coding and analysis.

The videotapes were coded using the Structural Analysis of Social Behavior model developed by Benjamin (Benjamin, 1979; Humphrey & Benjamin, 1984). The Structural Analysis of Social Behavior model, or SASB, lends itself well to a study of parenting because it permits coding of two key concepts in parenting research, control and support. Research on parenting typologies and dimensions has consistently identified parental support and parental control as two generic components of the child socializer role (Baumrind, 1971; Hoffman, 1980; Steinmetz, 1979). Support has been known by various other terms in the literature, including warmth, affection, nurturance, and acceptance. It can be defined as a gesture or significant symbol communicating that both the child and the child's behaviors are valued by parents. Control has usually been defined as actions used by parents in attempt to modify the behavior and internal states of children. Much research on parental discipline, dominance, restrictiveness, coercion, and power assertion is concerned with overt influence attempts by parents towards children (Peterson & Rollins, in press).

The SASB model has a circumplex structure based on the axes of attachment (rejecting versus nurturing) and interdependence (freeing versus controlling). The attachment axis can be viewed as describing support, while the interdependence axis can be viewed as a measure of control. Thus the SASB allows for the examination of the combined effects of control and support directed by parent to child.

The hypotheses of the present study pertain to mothers' parenting behaviors. However, the SASB provides equally rich and detailed data about the child's behavior toward the parent. This is because the SASB model comprises two interpersonal types of "focus". One plane of the model describes a focus on other, identifying behaviors which are prototypic of the parent role. The other plane describes a focus on self, identifying complementary behaviors which are prototypic of the child role. The underlying structure of the model is shown in Figure 1.

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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While Figure 1 shows the skeleton of the model, Figure 2 gives the full model, with 36 behaviors which are prototypic of the parent role, and the corresponding 36 behaviors that are likely to be a child's response. The items between the poles of the axes can be considered points on a continuum

between extremes.

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Insert Figure 2 about here

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Parents and children do not necessarily behave in prototypic ways, and it is quite possible that parents will show behaviors represented on the second, or "childlike" plane, while children behave in ways indicated on the first, or "parentlike" plane. The two planes together describe dyadic interaction at any given moment, regardless of who takes the roles described by the two planes. As Humphrey and Benjamin point out (1984), the truly enmeshed family member both submits and controls, while the differentiated person both gives and takes autonomy.

The division of behavior into prototypically parentlike and prototypically childlike behaviors is of special interest in the study of abusive families, in which parents are assumed to be emotionally needy and perhaps "childlike", while children may serve as emotional caretakers, showing "parentlike" behaviors.

For purposes of analysis and comparison, the 36 behaviors of each plane may be collapsed into 8 categories of behaviors. Each category is called a "cluster". The cluster version of the model is shown in Figure 3. This version of the model is used in the analysis of family interaction in this study.

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Insert Figure 3 about here

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A more complete discussion of the SASB, including its derivation, is presented elsewhere (Benjamin, 1979; Benjamin et al, in press; Burkett, 1984).

To use the SASB to study interaction among family members, a verbatim transcript of the videotapes is prepared. Trained coders work from the videotape and transcript to categorize each segment of interaction according to focus ("Other" plane or "Self" plane) and cluster. Benjamin (in press) provides a more detailed discussion of the coding process and the training of coders. Several computer programs have been developed to analyze the codes. One such program, PROCESS, tells what percentage of one person's behavior to another falls into each "cluster" or behavior category. This information is charted in Figure 4 for one mother's behavior to her child. This mother and child are part of a comparison group family; she was not abused as a child.

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Insert Figure 4 about here

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It is easily seen that the majority of this woman's behavior towards her

child (58%) fell into the category of "helping, protecting" (14). Her next most frequent kind of behavior was "watching, managing" (15). Another computer program provides information on complex or "mixed" messages. Such messages contain two distinct and incompatible meanings that cannot be separated. Such messages are usually puzzling or disorienting to the receiver. Double-binds, for example, are one kind of complex, or mixed, message. A third computer program provides a sequential analysis of each kind of behavior by indicating what kind of behavior directly preceded it.

Self-Report Questionnaire

The third method used in the study is FACES II (Olson et al, 1982), a self-report of family behaviors. The respondent's rating of frequency of various family behaviors is used to place families on a circumplex model. The axes of this model represent the concepts of cohesion and adaptability. Inclusion of this method may shed light on whether the dimension of cohesion in FACES II is independent from the dimension of attachment (support) in the SASB. Similarly, the axis of adaptability in FACES II can be compared to the axis of interdependence (control) in the SASB.

Discussion

Family Interaction

Work is currently underway to code both the videotapes of family interaction and the audiotapes of the mothers' interviews. Figures 4 through 11 provide graphs of the interactions of five mother-child pairs. The graphs of those families in Group A (the mother was sexually abused as a child) are marked with a dark line at the bottom of each page for easy identification.

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Insert Figures 4 to 11 about here

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Family # 1203 (Figures 4 and 5) provides an example of a dyad with highly symmetrical behaviors. The mother showed a large proportion (58%) of "helping, protecting" (14) behavior. The child responded with an equally large proportion of the complementary behavior, "trusting, relying" (24). The behaviors can be seen on the SASB model to be complements because the second digits of the code numbers are the same. This is also an example of a family using few complex, or mixed, messages. This is a comparison group family with no history of abuse.

Family # 1105 (Figures 6 and 7) differs from the previous family in several respects. Notice the large numbers of total communications from mother to child: 170 in twelve minutes, compared to 57 for the previous mother. A comparatively large percent, 18%, of this mother's behavior was coded

"ignoring, neglecting" (18). Also, much of her behavior to her child consisted of complex (mixed) messages (29%). The child's chart shows the same percentage of complex messages, as well as a high 42% of behaviors in the category of "walling-off, avoiding" (28). The child may have been responding to all three of the mother's characteristics mentioned above.

A notable feature of Family # 1110 (Figures 8 and 9) is the "watching, managing" behavior of the mother. Also notice the very large number of messages directed at the daughter in twelve minutes, 216 of them. More than a quarter (28%) of the communication from mother to daughter consisted of mixed messages. The child responded with deferrence and submission (39% of all behaviors to mother) as well as "walling off, avoiding" behaviors. This family, like the previous family, were part of Group A (i.e., the mother was sexually abused in her childhood family).

Finally, Family # 3112 (Figures 10 and 11, also a Group A family) illustrates another feature of possible theoretical interest in this study. Almost a quarter (22%) of the mother's behaviors to the child consist of "disclosing, expressing" communications. Since this is far higher than for other dyads coded as yet, the question of adequate sub-system boundaries arises. The daughter responds with self-disclosure and deferrence.

If the hypotheses of the study are confirmed, previously abused women as a group will score higher on behaviors coded 15 and 18, and lower on behaviors coded 12 and 13.

Mothers' Interviews

While the codes of the interview with mothers have yet to be analyzed, initial impressions i icate that many Group A (previously abused) mothers fall into one of two categories. One category consists of women who struggle with depression, chemical abuse, and despair. These women function very marginally as parents, and have little energy or emotional resources available for raising children. Women in the second category have the energy and motivation to actively emphasize emphasize excellent parenting as a major personal goal, but they are caught up in a smothering, over-controlling, enmeshed kind of pseudo-nurturing.

Women in the first category have emotional needs that preclude their offering much support to their children. One such woman spoke of her own emotional resources in this way: "It's hard being a mother, because I'm needing to take care, right now, of myself, with some TLC (tender loving care), which I want my husband to fulfill, that he doesn't. So I get it other places. I could really use a Mom right now. I'm not getting a lot of love. I'm on empty right now, with the love, the caring, and the appreciation." Feeling that she was unloved, by herself and by others, she had little love to share. Her six-year-old daughter, in the familiar pattern described above, seems to give more than she receives. The mother describes being proud of the girl for "her being able to put up with my shit, when I was not accepting her for who she was, you know, she knew it, and she didn't give up on me. And she

still loved me, even though I didn't love her. I think that's really good, that a child knows a parent doesn't care for them, but is still there for the parent when they need them. So I think that, you know, I really love that about her." She perceptively saw herself as needing a mom, whereas her circumstances called on her to try to be the mom.

Mothers in this category are sometimes unable to provide their children with protection. One mother, who took drugs and exposed herself to toxic chemicals throughout her pregnancy, thought of it this way: "I knew, in my mind, that that boy was going to be all right. And I knew that there was nothing I was going to do that was going to hurt him, no matter how many awful things I did. I just jeopardized him one time after another, and I didn't worry about it; it was like I knew he was going to be OK, so I'm just not going to worry about it." This child too has learned, at age five, to take care of the mother's needs. When she goes on a "TV binge", watching for hours at a time, he interrupts only during commercials. "He just seems to take over."

These emotionally needy women generally feel very negative about themselves in general, and their mothering in particular. "I feel very inept", said one, "it's been hard, it's been really hard. Some said it would have been better if their children had never been born. Others spoke of their fear of the responsibility of parenthood, and their sorrow over the suffering their children had experienced. "I get real depressed when something hapens, and I think, 'Oh, my God, is this going to go into their adult life?'" reported a young mother of four pre-schoolers, who had traced the sexual abuse in her family back for five generations.

Mothers in the second category, by contrast, often felt positive and even enthused about their parenting. One described repeatedly how dependable she is for her girls, and how much they appreciate it. They had made being good mothers a "crusade", as one put it. "To have children and raise them right was my number one value," asserted one such mother. She described this as more important than marriage and attributed her first divorce to her unwillingness to give up the freedom to raise the children the way she saw fit. This woman described coping during childhood abuse by withdrawing into a fantasy of how she, in the future, would be a good parent.

These somewhat over-enthused mothers seem to act out of a strong need to parent well. One reported, "I know I wasn't raised right, at all, and I just decided my kids weren't going to get raised the same way I was, and I'd do the best I could: and at all times when I'm questioning something, I always seek out somebody, to find, until I feel comfortable the way I want to do something."

However, not having experienced functional parenting, the mothers lack a blueprint to guide them as to when they should feel comfortable. The mothers in this category, like those described above, use their children to meet their own emotional needs, particularly their needs for intimacy and companionship. Two women spoke in glowing terms about their pre-adolescent sons. One mother of four children explained, "Well, I've just always been crazy about him in every way. Even though I sometimes get frustrated with him. When I was single, I wanted four sons, and I got one. And I don't think I'm a

chauvinist, that way, but like I told him, 'I've enjoyed every minute of your life' and that's true." The other described a vacation trip with her son as "marvelous. He's a super traveling companion. I appreciate that we can be friends. (I'm very proud of) lots of things. He's a real beautiful person. I don't know way this makes me cry. Everything! I love his mind. I love his warmth. He's a good friend..... to a lot of people. I love that he's working on his sexism: he does have some real sexist attitudes but he's struggling with them. I love his joy of life."

A mother of a 10-year-old girl spoke with equal enthusisam of her relationship with her daughter. "One of the things we'll do together is sleep together and we'll stay up late, like 12:30, 1:00 in the morning, and talk, just talk. We'll talk, mostly, about all sorts of stuff. We'll talk about her friends, and we'll talk about my friends. I love it, I just love it. I love to do it, I wish I had 10 times the time to do it." Describing family play sessions with the girl and two younger children, she explained, "We laugh and tease a lot, a lot, we get into these things, putting ice down each others' backs, and trying to kiss each others' noses, and these silly things, all of us do, but with (the 10-year-old), of course, it's more equal. It's fun, it's like having a sibling. I end up being just like the kids. I enjoy not being parental with my kids sometimes." This is the mother whose behavior chart (Figure 10) shows a large proportion of self-disclosure, indicating possible subsystem boundary issues.

Other women spoke with a less cheerful and rather more desperate tone of their dependence on their children. "I don't have anybody else, but at least I have these two," said one. "They're my life; I'll do anything for them. I just hope that someday they're going to walk up and say, 'Thank you, Mom, for all them years, and I'm sure they will." This woman's strong need for the support of her children is reflected (Figure 8) in her highly controlling manner. She needs to control the child's responses because those responses are so crucial to the mother's self-esteem.

Children growing up with such intensely close relationships with a mother are likely to have problems in adolescence with the developmental need to separate from the parent and develop an independent identity. The mothers, while buoyed and enthusiastic now, may feel rejected and depressed as the children strive for emotional independence. The other possibility, of course, is that the children will not be able to differentiate, and will continue to meet their mothers' needs at the expense of their own.

Most of the respondents in this study have had personal counseling of some kind. Many have years of counseling experience with a variety of professionals. Yet their relationships with their children often indicate that parenting issues have not received sufficient attention. While their own personal issues are often so pressing that it is easy to see how changing parenting behavior gets put aside for "later", the truth may well be that "later" is too late to interrupt the cycle of behavior patterns that characterize families struggling with the effects of abuse.

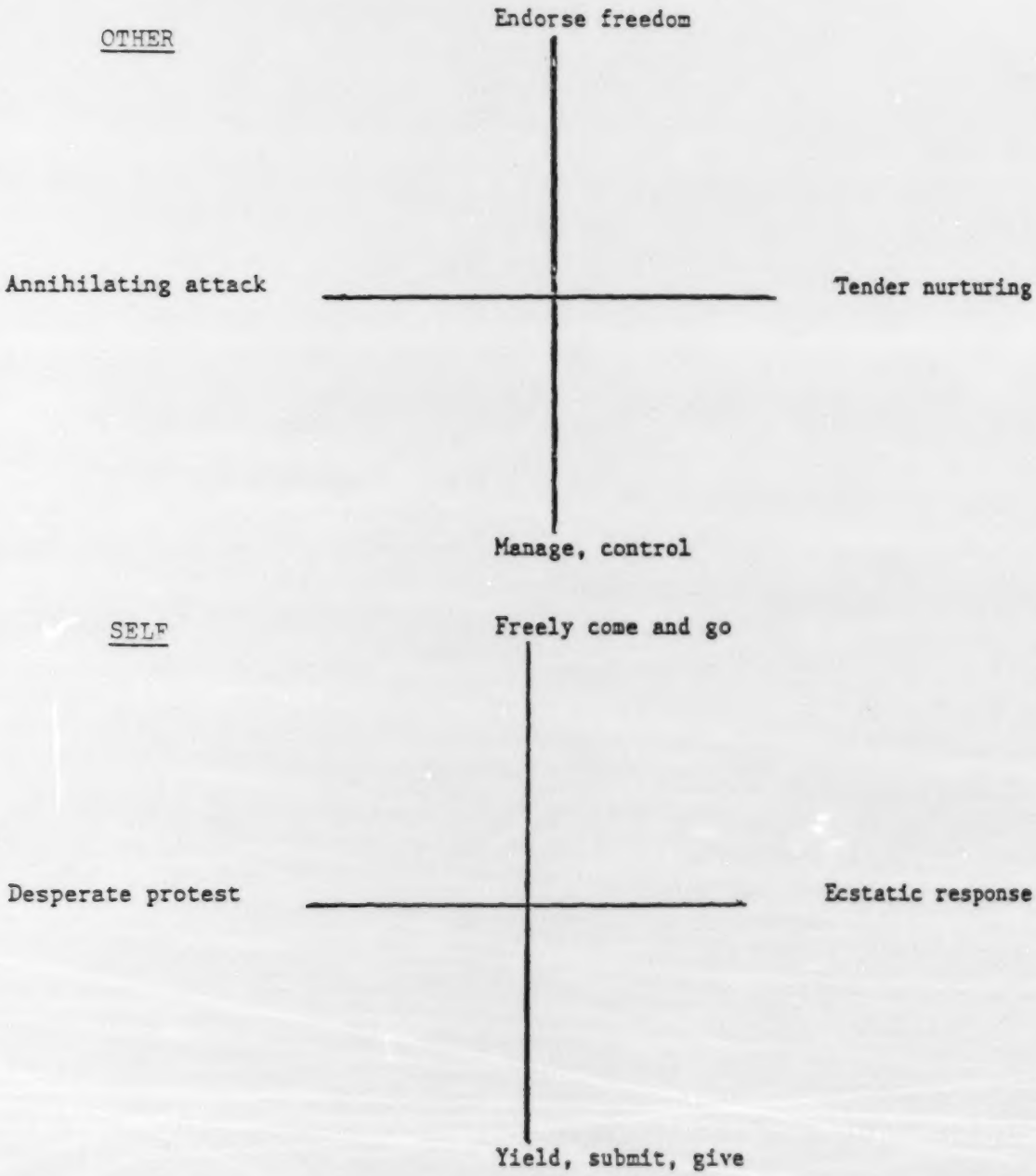

Figure 1. Chart of Social Behavior (Benjamin, 1979). The top surface describes interpersonal behaviors for which the focus is on the other person, and the lower surface shows interpersonal behaviors for which the focus is on the self. On each surface, the horizontal axis deals with rejection versus support, or affiliation, while the vertical axis describes control versus separateness, or interdependence.

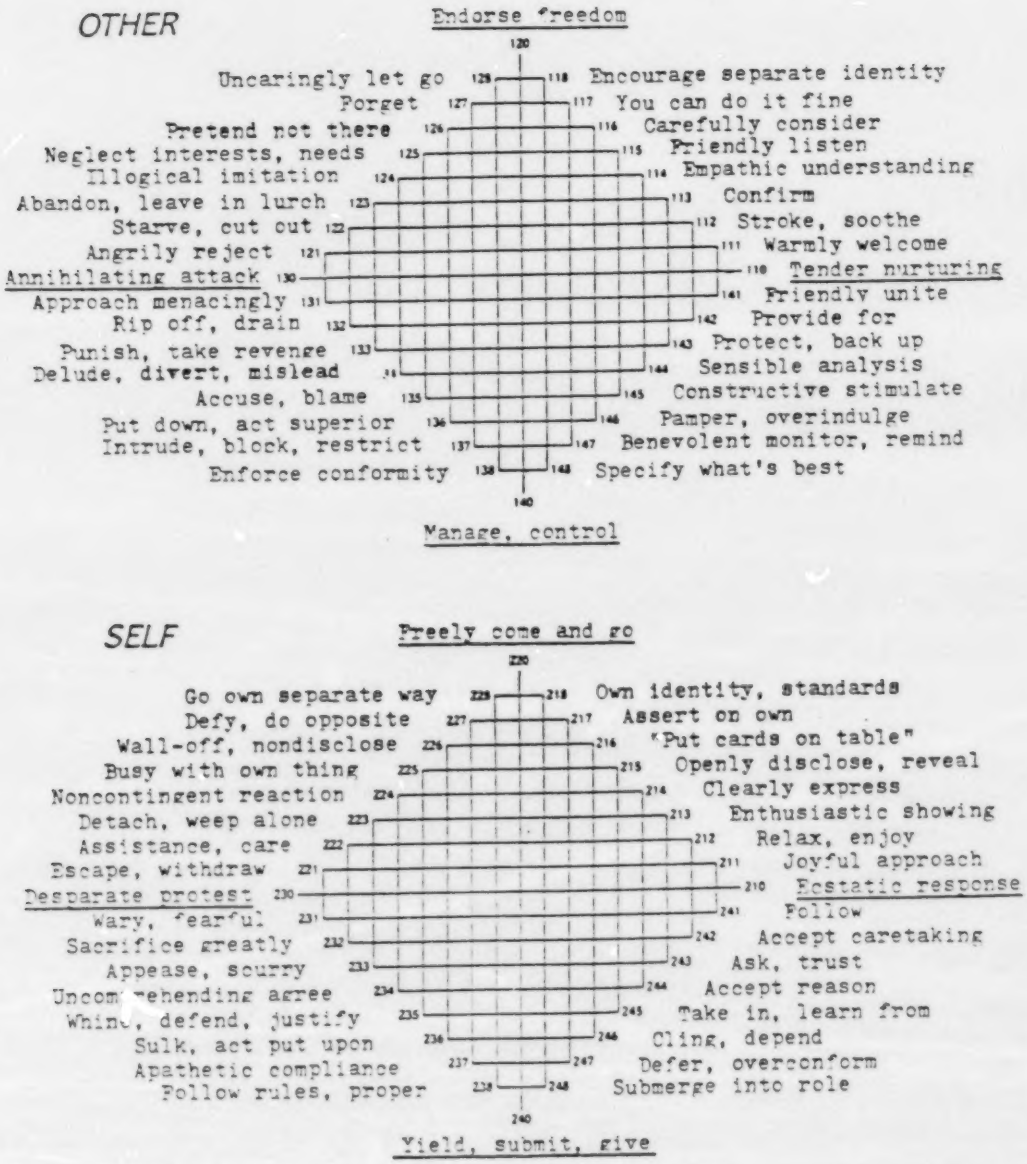

Figure 2. Chart of Social Behavior (Benjamin, 1979). The top surface describes interpersonal behaviors for which the focus is on the other person, and the lower surface shows interpersonal behaviors for which the focus is on the self. On both surfaces, the horizontal axis deals with rejection versus support (affiliation), while the vertical axis describes control versus separateness (interdependence).

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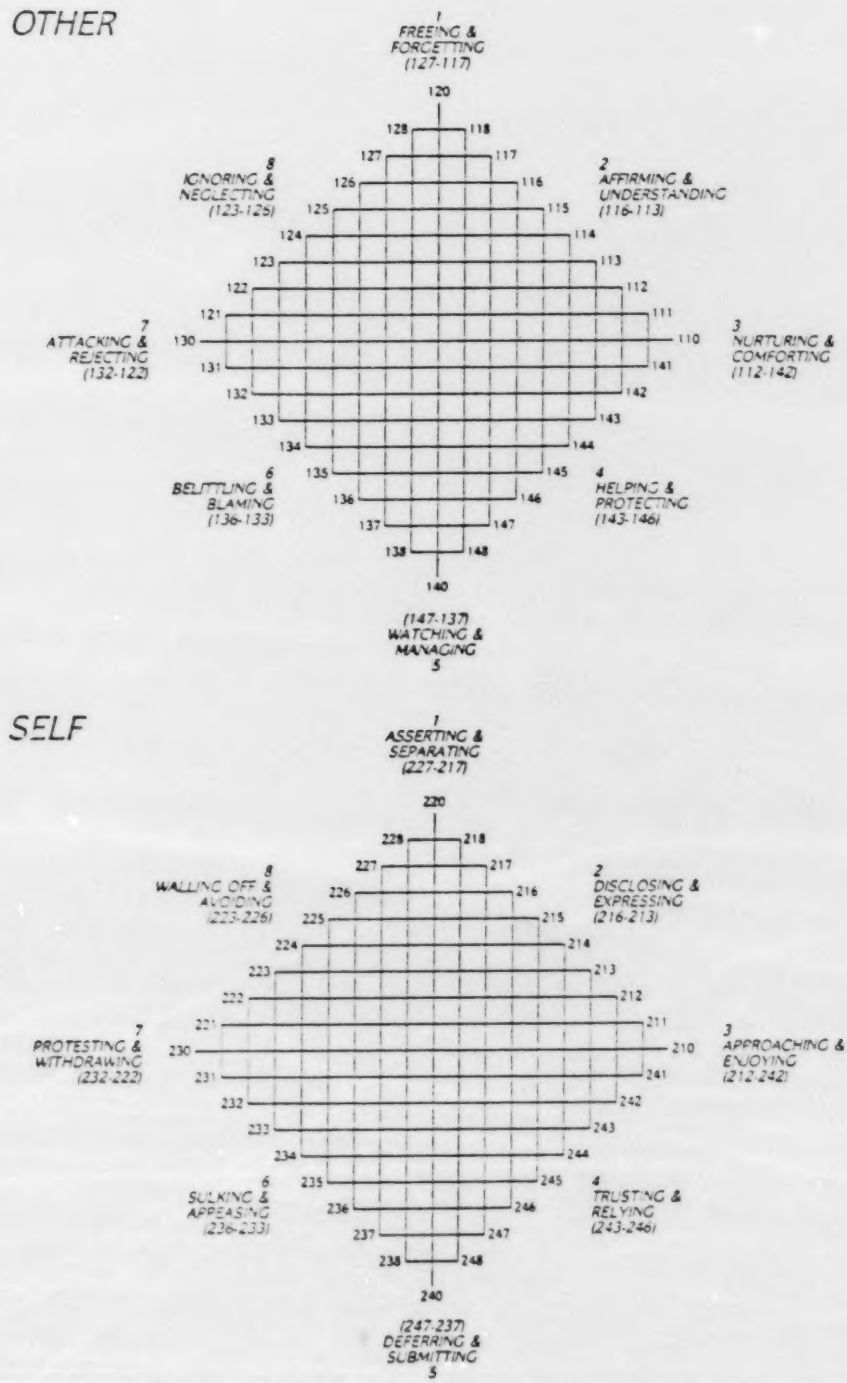

Figure 3. Cluster version of the SASB. The behaviors detailed on the full model are collapsed into sixteen categories, for easier analysis and comparison among groups.

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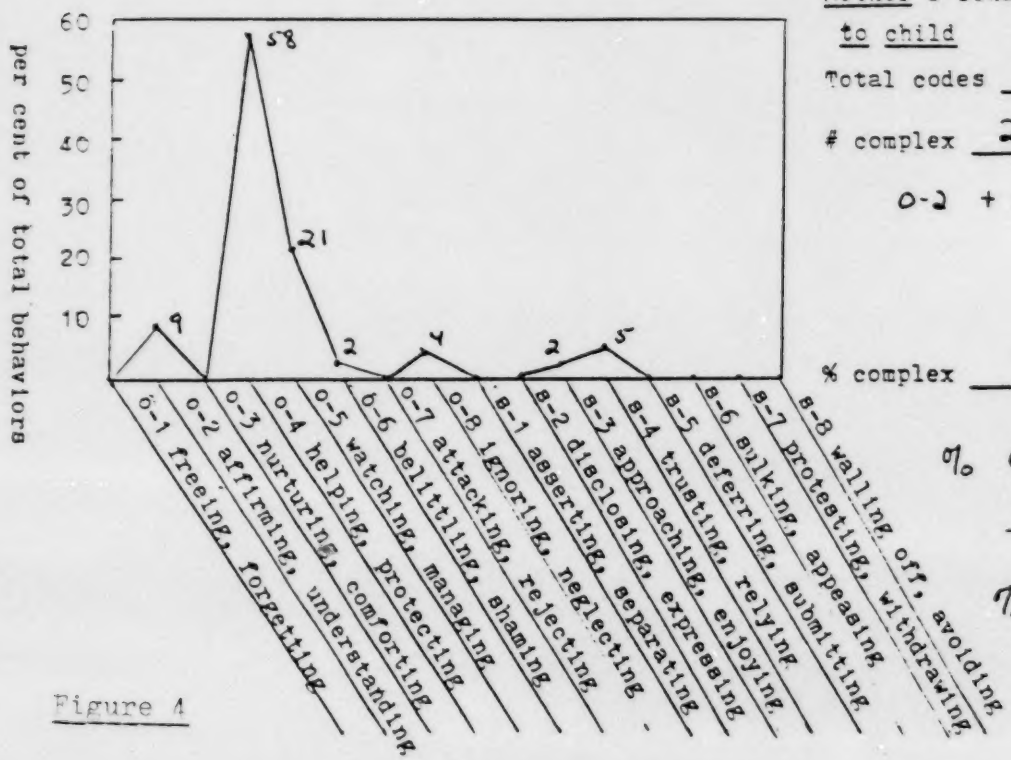
Family # 1203 boy. 9



Mother's behavior to child

Total codes 57

complex 2

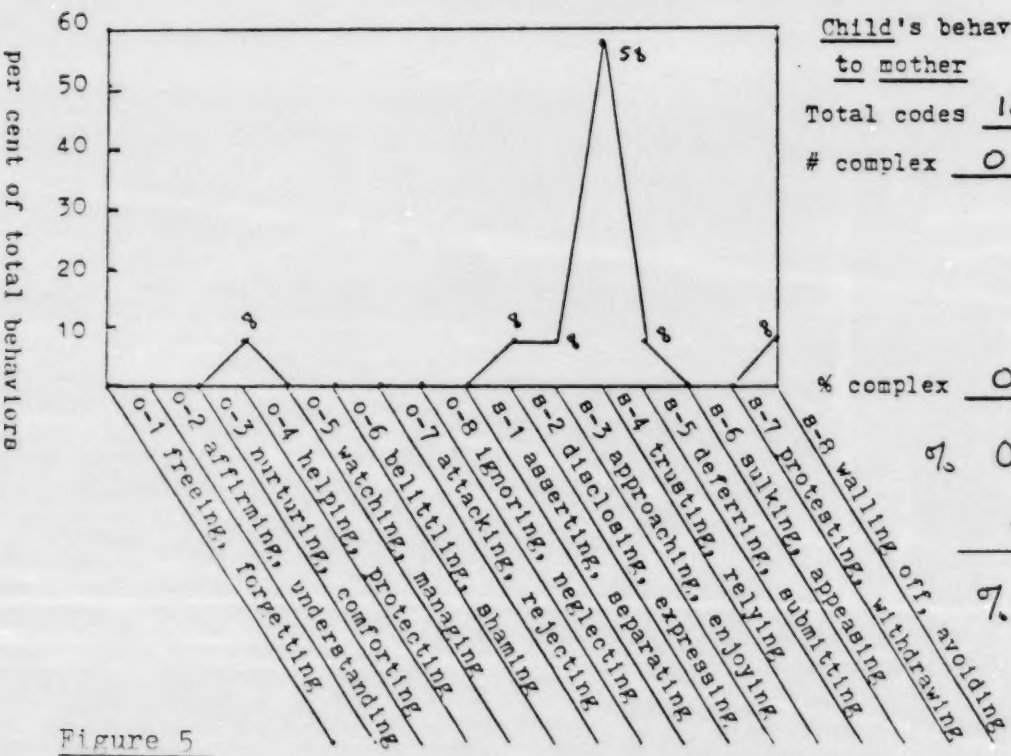
o-2 + o-5

% complex 7

% other 94

% self 7

Figure 4



Child's behavior to mother

Total codes 12

complex 0

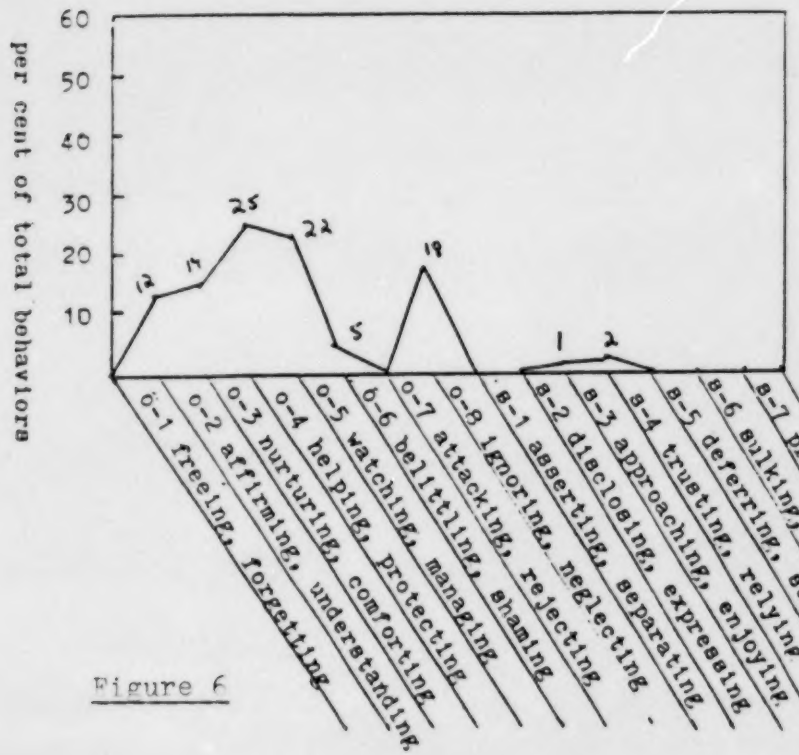
% complex 0

% other 8

% self 90

Figure 5

Family # 1105 boy 7



Mother's behavior to child

Total codes 170

complex 50

0-2 + 0-5

0-8 + 0-4

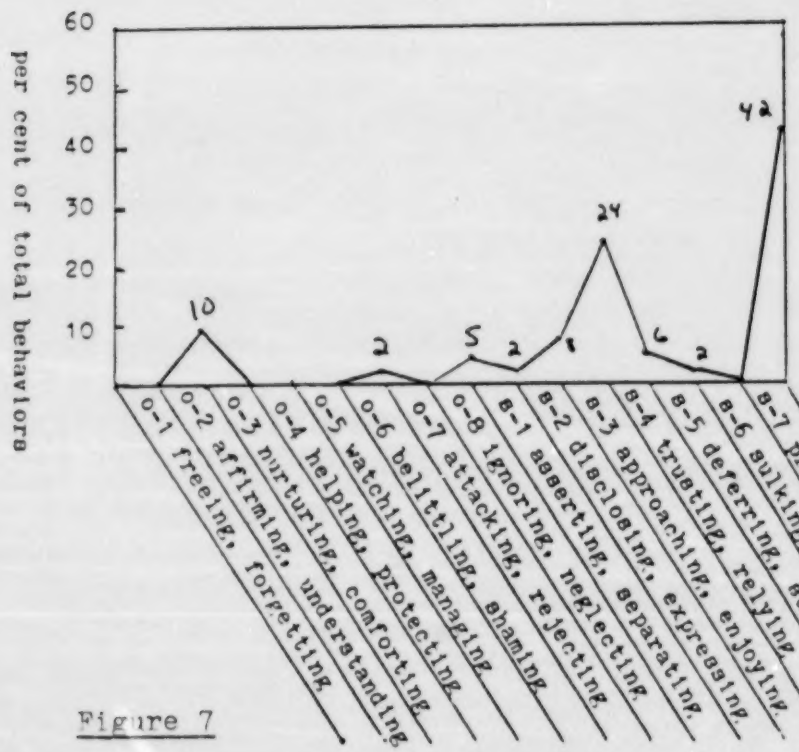
0-6 + 0-3

% complex 29

% Other 96

% Self 3

Figure 6



Child's behavior to mother

Total codes 62

complex 18

S-8 + S-4

S-8 + 0-3

% complex 29

% Other 12

% Self 89

Figure 7

Family # 1110 girl, 8

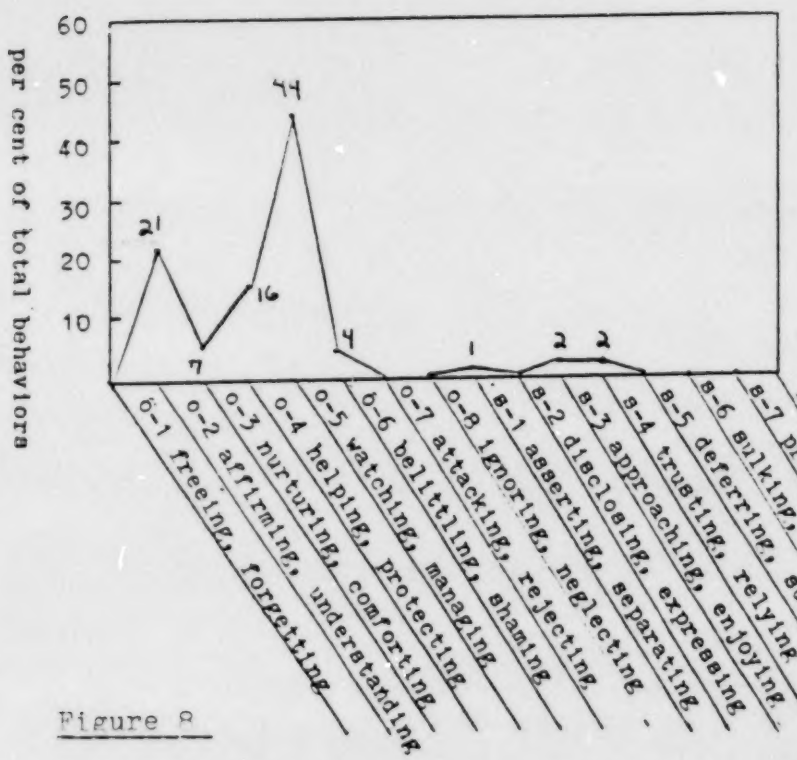


Figure 8

Mother's behavior to child

Total codes 216

complex 61

o-2 + o-5 (42)

o-3 + o-5 (9)

o-3 + o-6 (6)

% complex 28

% Other 92

% Self 5

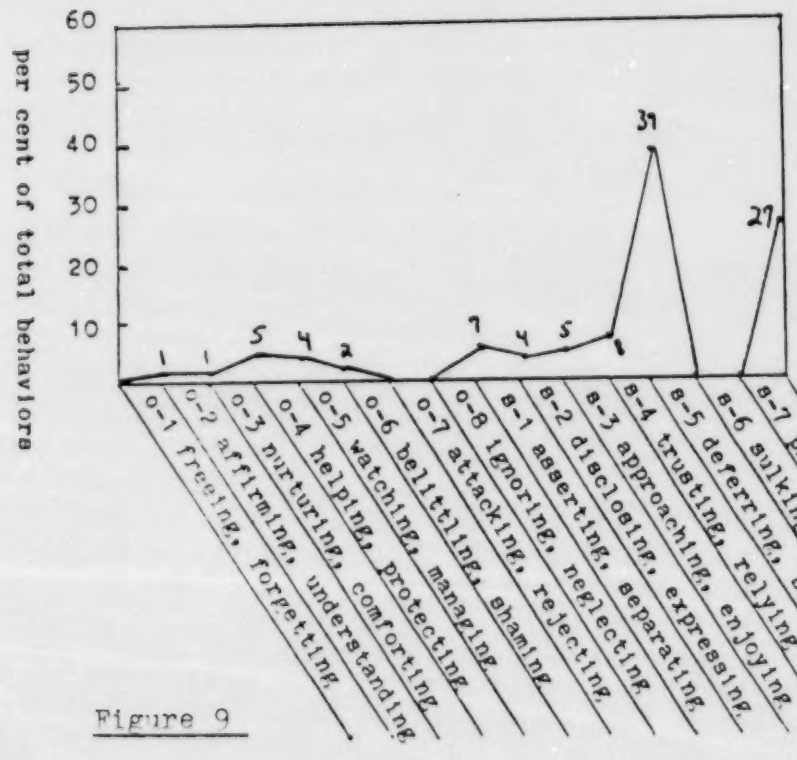


Figure 9

Child's behavior to mother

Total codes 128

complex 32

s-5 + s-8 (22)

o-3 + o-8 (2)

o-2 + o-5 (2)

o-3 + o-5 (2)

% complex 25

% Other 13

% Self 90

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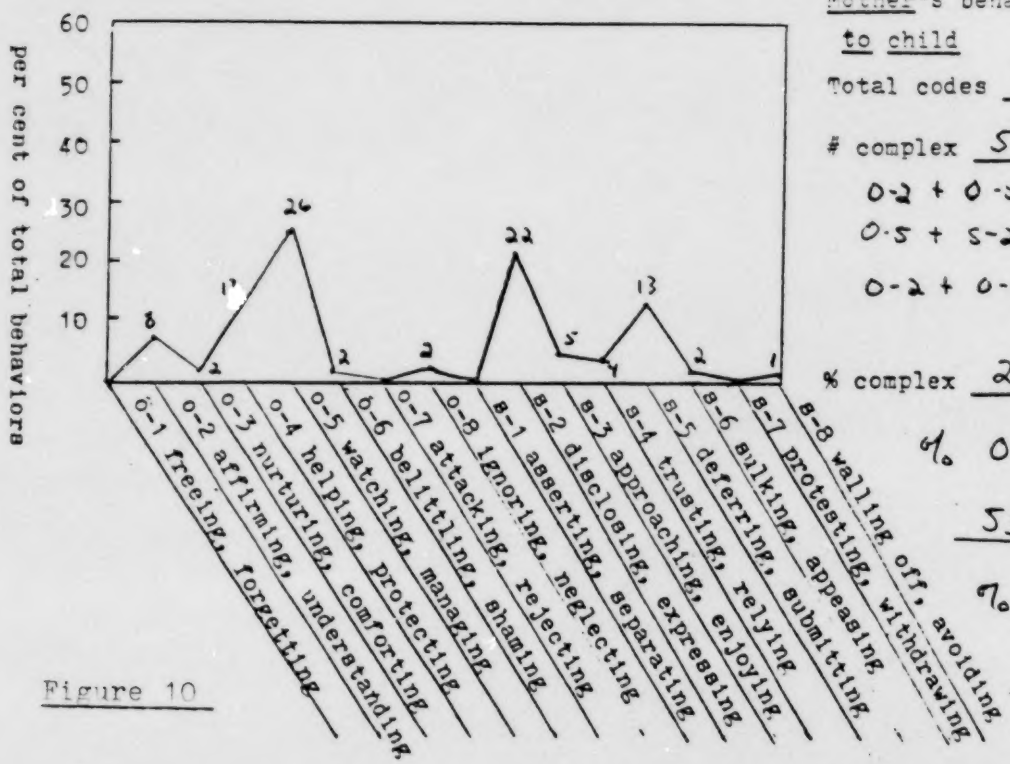
Family # 3112 girl 10



Mother's behavior to child

Total codes 181

complex 53

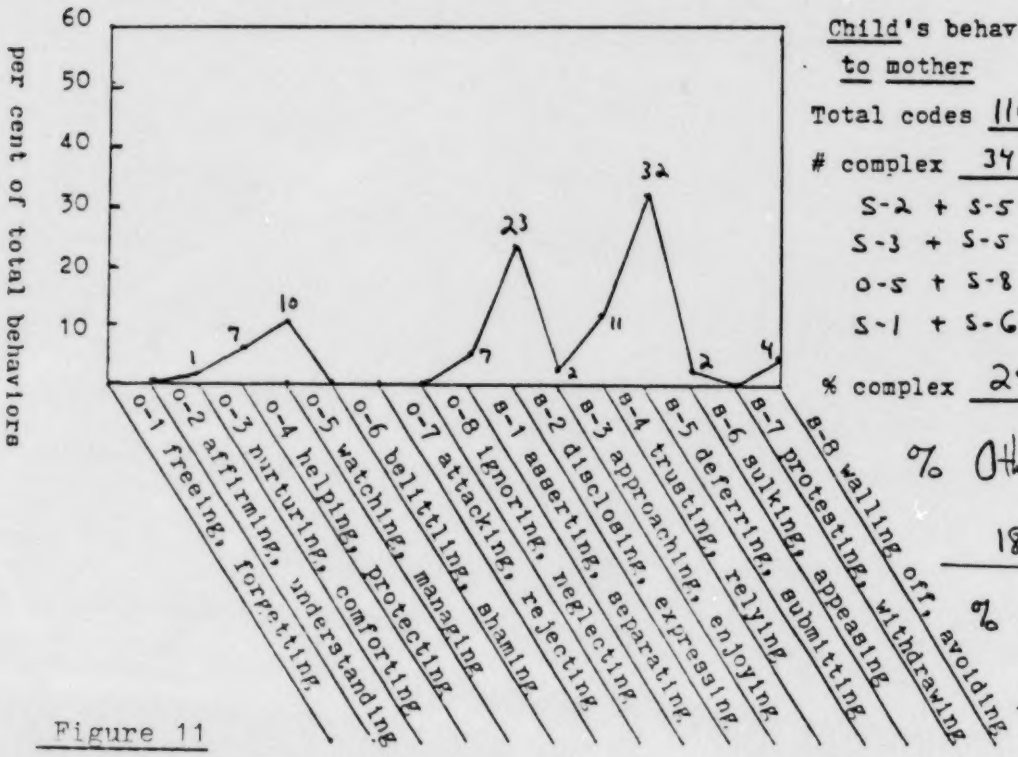
0-2 + 0-5 (17)
0-5 + 5-2 (12)
0-2 + 0-5 (8)

% complex 29

% Other 53

% Self 47

Figure 10



Child's behavior to mother

Total codes 116

complex 34

5-2 + 5-5 (25)
5-3 + 5-5 (3)
0-5 + 5-8 (2)
5-1 + 5-6 (2)

% complex 29

% Other 18

% Self 81

Figure 11

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